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Light..



....ON A NEW WORLD

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SECRETARY TO THE EDITORIAL PANEL

AND

CORRESPONDENCE EDITOR

*David Evans, 57 Longmead Drive,
Sidcup, Kent, DA14 4NT, England*

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Editorial

1983 — NINETEEN HUNDRED AND EIGHTY THREE. Whichever way you look at this date, it seems to have a futuristic ring about it. Can it *really* be that we have come to within two decades of the end of the 20th century? Time is unquestionably man's greatest enemy, for each year that passes is a year of our lives gone for ever. What we should ask is, 'Are they LOST years?' It is impossible to recall the years that have gone by, other than as a memory, but if our days are spent wisely and profitably in the sight of God, they need not be wasted years. The Psalmist said: *'We spend our years as a tale that is told.'*¹

How true! For the vast majority of human beings the story of their lives is but a short chapter written upon the pages of history, only to be forgotten and relegated to the dusty past.

Solomon was equally clear in his mind that we ought to spend our time sensibly, so that our future might be assured. Two quotations from the book of Ecclesiastes will serve to illustrate this.

'Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave whither thou goest.'²

Solomon ended his writing with this conclusion:

'Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.'³

It is clear, then, that we CAN spend our time both wisely and to our future profit. 1983 may well be the year in which the declared purpose of God will come to fruition in the return of Jesus Christ to the earth to establish his kingdom.

The Editorial Panel of LIGHT magazine would like to wish all our readers a Happy New Year, in the hope that it will indeed be the year of redemption for the world. In

¹ Psalm 90. 9

² Ecclesiastes 9. 10

³ Ecclesiastes 12. 13

so saying, however, it would be irresponsible of us not to point out that there is to be also a day of judgment. The parables of Jesus make this very clear. In telling the parable of the husbandmen, Jesus said, "*After a long time the lord of those servants cometh, and reckoneth with them*"⁴

It is a clear reference to his future return to take account of his servants, and it only the faithful who receive the promised reward.

How then can LIGHT magazine help our readers in 1983? The aim of the magazine is the defence and proclamation of the Gospel. In pursuing this aim, the articles for 1983 will try to cover a wide range of subjects. God willing, we shall re-commence the popular SIGNS OF THE TIMES articles, in which we examine the signs in the world around and relate them to the Scriptures and the promise of God to '*send Jesus Christ*'.⁵

Our deeper studies of the books of the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, will continue and we shall be pleased to receive correspondence on the content of these articles. This series in particular has been designed to show the consistent mind and purpose of God in His dealings with men, women and nations down the ages as His purpose has developed.

The Correspondence Editor receives a regular mail from readers of 'LIGHT on New World'. Some letters express agreement with our understanding of the Scriptures, while others are more critical of the views we propound. Sometimes the letters we receive express a rather sad, fatalistic view that there is little we can do about our destiny. For this reason, we reprint this month an article printed some years ago on the subject of PREDESTINATION. We hope it will help to encourage some of our readers — whatever their age or circumstances — in that the Almighty God is a merciful creator '*not willing that any should perish*'.⁶

Finally, our readers are reminded of another way in which they can obtain help in studying the word of God — the LIGHT BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE. Hundreds have enrolled from many countries across the world, and find the individual tuition of great value. There are two stages to the course — an introductory twelve lessons and an 'in-depth' manual-based study. We include in LIGHT this month a notice about the course on page 16, and if you feel that this would help you, please write to the Editor for full details and an enrolment form. The course is quite free.

ANNO DOMINI 1983 — the year of our Lord. It is the sincere hope of the Editorial Panel that *this year* will indeed be the year when our Lord returns to establish peace on earth, and when there will be Glory to God in the Highest.

Editor

⁴ Matthew 25. 19

⁵ Acts 3. 20

⁶ II Peter 3. 9

Predestination

MANY, EVEN AMONG those who acknowledge the justice and mercy of God, believe that the destiny of men and women is both foreknown and predetermined by God: that the career and the future of each individual are so fixed beforehand by the requirements of an unyielding purpose that he has no choice in the matter. Such believe that they are born either to eternal life or to eternal damnation, and that there is nothing that they can do about it.

CALVINISM

This view was prominent in the teaching of John Calvin in the sixteenth century, who asserted that 'as man's salvation is dependent upon the will of God to save, and as so obviously all men are not saved, then God has not willed to save them.' Such reasoning relieves men of responsibility for their misdeeds by laying the blame for their non-salvation at the door of God; at the same time it completely ignores the many offers of mercy, love and compassion which God has held out to men in all ages.

Such offers are clearly recorded in the Scriptures, where God is described as *'Merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin.'*¹

Such mercy, longsuffering and forgiveness are meaningless if no recognition is given to personal will and effort, because the destiny of the individual has been already determined. It is evident, then, that the view put forward by Calvin is inconsistent with the attributes of God revealed in the Bible.

BIBLE TEACHING

Yet it is clear from the following passages that the Bible does teach predestination:

'For whom he (God) did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren.

Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.'²

'He (God) hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world . . .

¹Exodus 34. 6, 7

²Romans 8. 29, 30

having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will . . . that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ . . . in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.'³

A careful examination of these and other passages of Scripture will show that there are fundamental differences between the teaching of Calvin and the teaching of the Bible concerning predestination.

NO PREDESTINATION TO CONDEMNATION

First, it is significant that nothing is said in these verses, or anywhere else, about predestination to CONDEMNATION. The two letters from which the verses are taken were written to believers, and that which was predestined was their privileged relationship to the Lord Jesus Christ and all that this involved. From this we can see at once that there are no grounds at all for the attitude of those who say that if they are among the damned there is no use in trying. Nowhere in the Bible is there any suggestion that some men are condemned in advance; on the contrary the Bible teaches very clearly that sincere repentance, even after a life-time of wrongdoing, will receive God's mercy and forgiveness:

'If the wicked will turn from all his sins that he hath committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die. All his transgressions that he hath committed, they shall not be mentioned unto him: in his righteousness that he hath done he shall live. Have I any pleasure at all that the wicked should die? saith the Lord God: and not that he should return from his ways, and live?''⁴

It is clear, from the verses quoted from Paul's letters, that predestination has to do only with those who are called to the purpose of God. Does this mean, then, that certain individuals have been marked out in advance by God for salvation, and that no one else stands a chance? Does it mean that these individuals cannot fail to receive God's blessing, regardless of their personal effort, or lack of effort, to serve Him?

GOD'S PURPOSE

To answer these questions it is necessary to take a wider view of the purpose of God, and of the place occupied in it by men and women. When God created the human race, it was with a definite end in view. This end was known to God, who also knew precisely how it would be achieved; just as an architect visualizes the finished building, and knows in advance every stage and detail of its construction. As the apostle James declared: '*Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.*'⁵ — a statement which reflects God's own declaration concerning Himself:

'I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done.'⁶

³ Ephesians 1. 4, 5, 10, 11 ⁴ Ezekiel 18. 21-23 ⁵ Acts 15. 18 ⁶ Isaiah 46. 9, 10

These declarations of the purpose of God are contained throughout the Scriptures. They show that it involves the selection of men and women who would be able to give God pleasure — men and women who would have the qualities necessary to achieve God's purpose of populating the earth with a race of beings who would reflect His glory. The future of those who are selected is 'predestined' or 'foreordained': God has determined that they will be given immortality; will become, as it were, His sons and daughters, and will enjoy eternal communion with Him. They will thus be *'conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren'*; they will have *'obtained an inheritance . . . according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will.'*

THE BASIS OF SELECTION

But what does selection imply? Does it mean that certain ones are selected for the accomplishment of God's purpose and, as that purpose cannot fail, they are therefore controlled in the exercise of their will? Does it imply an arbitrary choice, and that those not chosen have no opportunity of sharing? Evidently this is not so, for it is written,

'God is no respecter of persons: but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.'⁷

'God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth in Him* should not perish, but have everlasting life.'⁸

From these passages it is evident that it is not a case of arbitrary selection, but of taking part AT GOD'S OWN INVITATION AND ON GOD'S OWN TERMS.

This is important, and is the point at which so much human reasoning on this subject goes astray. It is GOD who invites, and it is God alone who lays down the conditions of acceptance. Consider again the illustration of the architect: when he has designed a building, he knows exactly the sort of materials he needs for its construction; he prepares the specification, and he may then invite offers for the supply of the materials needed. It is open to anyone to respond to this invitation, but only those materials will be accepted which conform precisely to the specification laid down. The destiny of these materials has been predetermined: the architect knows just where they are going, and the part which they will play in the finished structure.

There is, however, a difference between lifeless building materials and human beings. The quality of building materials can be assessed physically and visually, and their suitability judged accordingly, whereas the behaviour of human beings is subject to the changing whims of the human will. How, then, has it been possible for God to choose certain individuals for the accomplishment of His purpose, unless He has subsequently controlled their actions and by so doing has restricted the exercise of their freewill?

⁷ Acts 10. 34, 35

⁸ John 3. 16

GOD'S FOREKNOWLEDGE

The answer to these questions lies in an attribute of the Almighty which we do not possess, and therefore have difficulty in understanding. This is God's power to know in advance how a person will act, without actually influencing the person's actions.

That God has this power is indisputable; He declared, for example, concerning Abraham:

'Abraham shall surely become a great and mighty nation, and all the nations of the earth shall be blessed in him. For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.'⁹

God knew, in the case of Abraham, how he would act in certain circumstances — how he would respond to the difficulties and the trials which he would encounter. God knew, by this, that Abraham would be suitable material for the accomplishment of a particular phase of His purpose; and so he was called, as recorded in Genesis Ch. 12, and was used by God to found the nation of Israel. Abraham exercised complete freewill in the matter; he was under no compulsion; he responded willingly to God's call, and as a consequence was given certain promises by God.

So it was in the case of Jeremiah. God told him:

'Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.'¹⁰

God knew in advance what sort of a man Jeremiah would be. He knew that he would be one who would be capable of carrying out the very arduous and unpleasant mission which had to be performed; and so, with this foreknowledge, He 'ordained' him — He marked him out for this particular work.

It has been so throughout human history. God has seen, here and there, men and women who would suit His purpose. They have been, for the most part, men and women without outstanding ability — without the sort of qualities which men would choose. The qualities which have commended them to God have been a disposition to listen to Him, and to do His will. These God has called: He has so ordered affairs that they have had the opportunity of coming to a knowledge of His will and purpose; and where this knowledge has been received and properly applied throughout the remainder of their lives, their future destiny has been assured. But the salvation of such men and women is not automatic. They still have free-will, and it is still possible, as the apostle Paul shows,¹¹ for them to fall away and thus forfeit God's gracious gift of the promise of life. If this were not so, then the many exhortations to steadfastness, and the warnings against falling away, which are contained in the apostolic letters, all of which are addressed to believers, would be quite unnecessary.

⁹Genesis 18. 18, 19

¹⁰Jeremiah 1. 5

¹¹Hebrews 6. 4-6

The Gospel of John (part 2)

WITH ALL DUE respect to those who hold it, we come now to examine the doctrine of the Trinity in the light of Bible teaching. We do so in the context of John's gospel because churchgoers usually reckon this evangelist to be the most explicit in support of Trinitarian teaching. Therefore in studying what he was guided to write we are evaluating the strongest evidence which orthodox Christians can offer.

What then is Trinitarian teaching? Very briefly; it is that there are three distinct persons, the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, each co-equal and co-eternal in one Godhead. This teaching forms the basis of the church's interpretation of 'the incarnation'; it is contended that when Jesus was conceived it was no beginning of life for him, but instead a change of status — 'God, the Eternal Son' had 'stepped down', as it were, from his eternal glory and entered Mary's womb in order to be born a member of our fallen race. By such means he offered himself as the supreme sacrifice on the cross as a substitute for us, then rose and ascended to heaven, there to resume the glory he had previously enjoyed. Certain verses in this gospel are read

PREDESTINATION (continued)

The teaching of the Bible concerning Predestination, then, is one more illustration of how the unlimited power of God is exercised in wisdom, mercy and justice. Although He knows, inevitably, just who will be among that '*great multitude, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues,*'¹² who will share His glory when Jesus returns to establish His kingdom, yet the equity of the method used to select them cannot be gainsaid. God has issued an invitation which is open to all; God has made known the conditions for acceptance; and it is entirely OUR responsibility whether or not we respond and comply.

A. Hone
Bexley

¹² Revelation 7.9

as lending support to this thesis, but do they really teach what so many suppose they do?

OLD TESTAMENT FOUNDATIONS

We have noticed in Part One of this article how much the Apostle John was divinely influenced to use the Old Testament as the basis for his choice of themes from the life of Jesus. In type and allegory *'Moses and the Prophets'* foreshadowed the whole of God's purpose, afterwards revealed in all its fulness in the New Testament record. Each Testament expounds and complements the other, and there is perfect harmony between the two, for God is not the author of confusion but of orderly and consistent design.¹ What this means in practice is that the teaching to be found in the writings of John and the other apostles is squarely based on Old Testament revelation and must be understood in harmony with that earlier inspired volume. Let us take one example, which will show as well as any the necessity of interpreting key words in their scriptural context; we must not come to them with preconceived ideas based on Gentile traditions.

WHO IN SCRIPTURE IS CALLED 'GOD'?

This is a fundamental point. The word *'God'* (Hebrew: *'Elohim'*) is used in the Bible not only for our Creator, but also for the angels², for Israel³ and for Jesus⁴. The word therefore includes any individual or group in whom the Father chooses to manifest His power and authority. This concept of delegated authority is very clearly seen in the case of the angel whom God appointed as Israel's guide to lead them through the desert. The people were told:

'Do not rebel against him; he will not forgive your rebellion, since my Name is in him. If you listen carefully to what *he* says and do all that *I* say, I will be an enemy to your enemies . . .'⁵

Here is the Father's authority vested in His angel; what the angel says is, in fact, what God Himself says, as it is true whenever angels speak, for by definition they are God's messengers and, as we have just noted, have the power to forgive or retain sins. In the New Testament we find a perfectly consistent extension of this usage where Jesus too has been given power to speak God's words and to forgive sins⁶ — indeed a greater authority than that of the angels because his divine begetting had placed him above them.⁷ But his being called *'God'* does not make him equal to the Father, any more than we would regard the angels as equal to God, although called *'God'* in this context.

THE FATHER'S SUPERIORITY

There can be no question that the angels are God's obedient servants, sent out by Him to fulfil His will.⁸ Similarly, the language of both Old and New Testaments is specific that Jesus also was God's servant, sent by the Father to do His will.⁹ God, the supreme, was pleased to vest in the Son authority not only to forgive sins but also to raise the dead and at the appointed time to be their judge.¹⁰ However, it is abundantly clear from the language used that it was the Father who issued the

commands, the Son who obeyed. This order is maintained consistently throughout John's writings, and indeed Trinitarians concede that there was a temporary 'stepping down' by the Son from his supposed earlier position of equality. But the apostolic writings — and Jesus himself — continue in this vein *after* his resurrection. For example, Paul refers to '*the God of our Lord Jesus Christ*'¹¹ and writes elsewhere: '*the head of Christ is God*.'¹² Four times in a verse Jesus calls his Father '*My God*',¹³ as he also does in this gospel.¹⁴ So when Thomas addresses Jesus as '*My God*', acknowledging the exalted status of the resurrected Christ, he is recognising a great superior being;¹⁵ by the same yardstick, Jesus exalts his Father and bows to His superiority — and this too *after* his resurrection and ascension.

Irrefutable confirmation comes from Paul's 'thumbnail summary' of the Millennium, at the end of which

'the Son himself will also be subjected to Him who put all things under him, that God may be everything to everyone'¹⁶

'HARD SAYINGS'?

There can be no doubt that Jesus did, on occasions, make statements difficult to understand,¹⁷ but the verses selected to oppose the above conclusions hardly warrant this description. For example, the Jews tried to kill Jesus after alleging that

'Not only was he *breaking the Sabbath*, but he was even calling God his own Father, *making himself equal with God*.'¹⁸

This was, however, their own biased *inference* on both counts and not supported by the facts of the case. The law to rest on the Sabbath was *not* broken by performing an act of healing on it. Similarly, when Jesus called God his Father, it was no claim to equality with Him — do not all churchgoers use 'the Lord's Prayer' without any thought of equality?

The other much-used passage in this connection is: '*I and the Father are one*'.¹⁹ But 'unity' does not necessarily imply 'equality', as must be obvious in the reference to believers being *united* with Christ.²⁰ In another place where the underlying grammatical structure is identical, a modern pro-Trinitarian version has in fact rendered it: 'have one purpose',²¹ and this would suit the present context admirably — the Father and Son being wholly 'at one' in their concern for the welfare of 'the sheep'. We conclude that neither in John's gospel nor elsewhere is there any real support for the Trinitarian doctrine of 'co-equality' — and without this vital component the basic teaching of orthodox Christianity is proved fallacious, a serious perversion of the truth.

DID JESUS PRE-EXIST?

We must not look at the associated teaching of the *later* creeds,²² viz. that Jesus is 'God, the Eternal Son'. There is a marked doctrinal shift between Justin Martyr's simple belief (about A.D. 150-155) that

'... we honour him who ... is the Son of the true God *and holding him in the second rank*, and the prophetic Spirit third in order ...'²³

and the statement of Irenaeus (second half of the second century):

‘... Christ Jesus the Son of God, who because of his outstanding love towards his creation *endured the birth from the virgin* . . .’²⁴

In the latter quotation the idea of Christ’s pre-existence is clearly in view. But we note at the outset that we have here an inbuilt contradiction of terms. By any meaningful interpretation of ‘Father’ and ‘Son’, the former *must* have preceded the latter. It is no argument to say this is ‘a great mystery’, for Scripture was given to reveal, not to conceal, and Bible ‘mysteries’ are strictly ‘revealed secrets’.

Nevertheless there *are* passages which seem to imply a more limited pre-existence of the Lord, in particular those in which he refers to the glory he had had with his Father, who loved him before the foundation of the world.²⁵ However, before we jump to hasty conclusions, two facts should be borne in mind, viz. the complete foreknowledge of God²⁶ and the way events are often recorded in *anticipation* of their fulfilment. A striking example of the latter is contained in John 17, where Jesus says *before* his crucifixion: ‘I have *FINISHED* the work which Thou gavest me to do’ (verse 4). The same mode of speaking appears frequently in Scripture.²⁷ In Malachi we read that because of His foreknowledge, God loved Jacob and hated Esau *before* these twins had done anything good or evil, and indeed *before* they were born.²⁸ Similarly, God loved His Son from the beginning, foreseeing his absolute obedience to the Father’s will.²⁹ It is equally true that God has loved from *before* the creation ALL who would eventually be born and render to Him the obedience and trust He requires, for Paul wrote to the Ephesians that God *chose us in him (Christ) before the foundation of the world*’, and to Timothy he wrote that God’s grace ‘*was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began*’.³⁰ Did believers exist ‘*before the world began*’? Cannot we see that God knew their response to the Gospel call at the outset and loved and chose them in view of their forthcoming obedience?³¹

A proper understanding of this anticipatory mode of Bible revelation will save us from the impossible concept of an *immortal* and *incorruptible* God (who cannot be tempted with evil)^{31A} somehow surrendering these intrinsic characteristics in order to *suffer temptation* and *die* as a sacrifice. Rather with Peter we gladly accept the teaching that Christ

‘*was foreknown* indeed before the foundation of the world but *was manifested* at the end of the times for your sake, who through him are believers in God, which raised him from the dead and gave him glory’.³²

Note once again how in this passage too it is the Father who raises His Son and glorifies him.

‘IN THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD’

Two passages at the beginning of John’s gospel are often cited by Trinitarians:

‘In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made’.

'And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father), full of grace and truth.'³³

The assumption is made that '*the Word*' in the earlier passage is Jesus *in person*, hence he is God and all things were made by him. But there are problems here both of translation and interpretation. William Tyndale, the 'father' of the Authorised Version, translated verse 3: '*All thynges were made by it, and with out it was made noo thing, that made was.*' On the question of interpretation, the 'Translator's New Testament', issued by the British and Foreign Bible Society, points out that the Greek word 'logos' (translated '*Word*') represents the Hebrew word 'davar', the creative Word of God as found in Genesis 1: '*God said . . . and it was.*'³⁴ The idea of the Word of God as active, powerful and effective is a feature of Hebrew religion.³⁵ To the Greeks the word referred to the fashioning and controlling of the world in an orderly way by Mind or Reason. Jewish thinkers associated the terms 'logos' with their own idea of Wisdom . . . see Proverbs 8. 22-31 (where the word is feminine!).

'All these ideas are probably present when John uses the word 'logos' in these opening verses . . . *the translator must be on his guard against identifying the Word with Jesus Christ at too early a stage.*'³⁶

This is in agreement with G. B. Caird in his 'Language and Imagery of the Bible', who offers the following interpretative translation:

'In the beginning was a purpose, a purpose in the mind of God, a purpose which was God's own being.'³⁷

John Marsh too, in the Penguin commentary on this gospel says:

'The Word may thus be likened to the eternal purpose of God, giving meaning to the whole of existence.'³⁸

In the fulness of time '*the Word was made flesh*,' i.e. the purpose was realised in the conception and birth of Jesus, '*made of a woman, made under the law, to redeem them that were under the law*' . . .³⁹

'BEFORE ABRAHAM WAS, I AM'⁴⁰

Trinitarians see in the above words Jesus' claim to the divine name revealed in Exodus 3. 14, rendered '*I am*' in the Authorised Version. There appears to be no valid connection here, for the Hebrew word ('ehyeh') should rather be translated '*I will be*'⁴¹ and John does not follow the Greek (Septuagint) wording. In John 9. 9 the blind man healed by Jesus also says '*I am (he)*' but we can hardly suppose *he* was claiming the divine title! The other four references in John's gospel where Jesus uses the same expression all add the word '*he*' (not expressed in the Greek).⁴² From these it would appear that Jesus is referring to his *Messiahship*, i.e. that he was truly 'the Lord's Anointed' to be Israel's saviour and king. In the immediate context Jesus had just said that Abraham rejoiced to see his day. Reference to the Genesis account shows that God had promised on oath to Abraham a '*seed*' or descendant in whom all nations would be blessed, and the patriarch was joyful over this divine promise.

But 2,000 years *before* Abraham, in the garden of Eden, the same 'seed' had been promised to Eve who would bruise the serpent's head — the earliest direct reference to Christ's work of taking away sin by his own sacrifice.⁴³ Both in time and precedence, Jesus was long before Abraham.

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Doctrinal teaching on this most important subject is, like all other Bible 'first principles', founded squarely on Old Testament teaching. The Hebrew word for 'spirit' (*ruach*) is also used for 'wind', 'breath', 'life', 'feeling', emotion and notably 'mind'^{43A} — the underlying idea apparently being that of an invisible power capable of producing visible movement or reaction.

'*The Spirit of God*' is testified as being God's all-pervading power, animating all living things.⁴⁴ It was hovering over the waters before Creation, ready to be called into action.⁴⁵ But was this mighty power a being *apart* from God Himself? Through the prophet Isaiah God says, referring to the great work of Creation:

'Who has measured the waters in the hollow of his hand,
Or with the breadth of his hand marked off the heavens
Who has held the dust of the earth in a basket,
Or weighed the mountains on the scales
And the hills in a balance?'

The only possible answer is 'God Himself'. The prophecy continues:

'Who has understood *the Spirit of the Lord*,
Or instructed him as *his counsellor*?
Whom did the Lord consult to enlighten him
And who taught him the right way? . . .'⁴⁶

The answer to these latter questions is clearly 'Nobody'. God needed no-one to teach or advise Him, for He was His own counsellor. The Greek version of the Old Testament translates '*Who has understood the Spirit of the Lord . . . ?*' as '*Who has known the mind of the Lord?*' The Apostle Paul quotes the passage in this form and in the same context affirms that just as on the human level a man's own spirit within him alone knows his thoughts, so the thoughts of God are known only to His Spirit i.e. to His own mind.⁴⁷ We would disallow any idea that made a man and his mind into two separate persons; similarly, God and His mind or Spirit are *one and the same person*.

THE COUNSELLOR

We are now equipped scripturally to understand Jesus' promise to his disciples that he would, after his resurrection, send '*another Counsellor*' (A.V. '*Comforter*') to be with them for ever — '*the Spirit of truth*'.⁴⁸ While on earth Jesus himself had been their guide and counsellor, but with his ascension to heaven they were going to need God's wisdom as a special gift, in order to be witnesses of Christ's resurrection in a hostile world. Jesus' promise was fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, when the Apostles were '*clothed with power from on high*'⁴⁹, God's Spirit being poured out

on them.⁵⁰ (Can a *person* be 'poured out'?) The Apostles were, in fact, *anointed* with the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus himself had been earlier on.⁵¹

Many religious people have stumbled over the use of the personal pronouns 'he' and 'him' in reference to the '*Counsellor*', unaware that the Greek original merely follows the rule of agreement in gender, and this noun happens to be masculine; 'spirit' is neuter and therefore takes the pronoun 'which'. One cannot legitimately infer 'personality' or otherwise on the grounds of this purely grammatical device.

There is undoubtedly in John's gospel a *personification* of God's Spirit, as there is elsewhere of wisdom, riches, sin and other abstract ideas.⁵² However, John tells us in his first letter that '*the Spirit is the Truth*'⁵³, which is God's Word or testimony implanted in faithful men and women, directing their lives along the path God desires.⁵⁴ Jesus said:

'The words that I have spoken to you *are spirit* and life.'⁵⁵ 'These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.'⁵⁶

Thus we have as much of the Spirit of God in us as we have of the words of Christ. It is essential, therefore, that we accept God's truth through Christ and his Apostles with willing and open hearts, studying the written word with all care and diligence, that our lives may be moulded by it into the divine pattern so perfectly exemplified in Jesus himself.

J. H. Broughton
Pontesbury

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- I Corinthians 14. 33 ² Genesis 31. 11, 13; 48. 15, 16 ³ Psalm 82. 1, 6; John 10. 3, 35 ⁴ Psalm 45. 6; Hebrews 1.8 ⁵ Exodus 23. 21, 22 (N.I.V.)
⁶ John 7. 16, 17; 8. 28; Mark 2. 10 ⁷ Hebrews 1. 1-4 ⁸ Psalm 103. 20, 21; Hebrews 1. 13, 14 ⁹ Isaiah 42. 1-4; 52. 13-53; 12; John 6. 38 ¹⁰ John 5. 25-27 ¹¹ Ephesians 1. 17 ¹² I Corinthians 11.3 ¹³ Revelation 3. 12 ¹⁴ John 20.17 ¹⁵ John 20. 28 ¹⁶ I Corinthians 15. 28 (R.S.V.)
¹⁷ John 6. 60; 16. 18 ¹⁸ John 5. 18 (N.I.V.) ¹⁹ John 10.30 (R.V.) ²⁰ John 17.20-23; Romans 6. 5(R.V.) ²¹ I Corinthians 3. 8 (N.I.V.) ²² The 'Apostles Creed' is not Trinitarian ²³ J. N. D. Kelly: 'Early Christian Creeds': Longmans 3rd edn 1972 p.72 ²⁴ Ibid, p.80 ²⁵ John 17. 5, 24 ²⁶ Isaiah 45. 21; Acts 15. 18 ²⁷ Joshua 8. 1; 10. 8; Jeremiah 1. 5; Romans 8. 30; Hebrews 10. 14
²⁸ Malachi 1. 2, 3; Romans 9. 10-13 ²⁹ Isaiah 42. 1 ³⁰ Ephesians 1. 4 (R.V.); II Timothy 1. 9 ³¹ II Thessalonians 2. 13 ^{31A} James 1. 13 ³² I Peter 1. 20, 21 (R.V.) ³³ John 1. 1-3, 14 ³⁴ cp Psalm 33. 6, 9 ³⁵ cp Isaiah 55. 3-11 ³⁶ p. 451. Some condensation has been made to save space
³⁷ p. 102 ³⁸ p. 97 ³⁹ Galatians 4. 4, 5 ⁴⁰ John 8. 58 ⁴¹ Exodus 3. 14 (R.V. margin) ⁴² John 4. 26; 8. 24, 28; 13. 19 ⁴³ Genesis 3. 15 ^{43A} Genesis 26. 35; Ezekiel 5. 20. 32 Habakkuk 1. 11; Daniel 5. 20 ⁴⁴ Job 33. 4; Psalm 104. 29, 30 ⁴⁵ Genesis 1. 2 ⁴⁶ Isaiah 40. 12-14 (N.I.V.) ⁴⁷ I Corinthians 2. 10-16 ⁴⁸ John 14. 16, 17 ⁴⁹ Luke 24. 49 (R.V.) ⁵⁰ Acts 2. 17, 18, 33 ⁵¹ II Corinthians 1. 21; I John 2. 27; Acts 10. 28 ⁵² Proverbs 8.1 ff; Luke 6. 13; Romans 6. 23 ⁵³ I John 5. 7 (R.V.) ⁵⁴ James 1. 18 ⁵⁵ John 6. 53 ⁵⁶ John 14. 24

CORRESPONDENCE

The Christadelphians will be pleased to answer questions on matters of Bible teaching either privately or in the pages of *LIGHT*, and correspondence will be welcome. Letters should be addressed to the Correspondence Editor, 57 Longmead Drive, Sidcup, Kent, England.

If a letter is intended for publication, please write on one side of the paper only.

Mr. P. Baiden writes from Ghana, West Africa

Sir,

I am a regular reader of the LIGHT on a New World Magazine. I have read about Israel, the chosen people of God. The Israelites also admit the same, and this is what they are at war. Please give your comment on this question:

The children of Israel were given a large portion of land. According to the Bible story of Jeroboam (1 Kings 14. v 33-34), God rejected the children of Israel. Now the Israelites are at present fighting for a land which is being occupied by Non-Israelites. Do you think they will succeed in their fight and possess the land, whereas God had rejected them long ago?

The Correspondence Editor replies:

Dear Mr. Baiden,

After the Israelites had wandered for 40 years in the wilderness under the leadership of Moses, Moses died and he was succeeded by Joshua who was commanded by God to take the nation into the arid land to drive out the inhabitants whose wicked practices were abhorrent to the Almighty. This is recorded in Joshua chapter 1. But Israel were told by God through Moses that if they did not carry this out in its entirety *'then those which ye let remain of them shall be pricks in your eyes and thorns in your sides, and shall vex you in the land wherein ye dwell.'* Numbers 33. v. 55. Well, Israel did not drive out all the inhabitants of the land, and as God had foreseen, they soon fell into their practices. They did not carry out God's commandments and therefore God ceased to be with them. This can be seen from Judges chapter 1 and chapter 2 v. 1-3.

The subsequent history of Israel is one of continual defection from their God both under the Judges and then under the Kings of Israel and Judah, until the time came when God allowed both kingdoms to be taken into captivity by the Assyrians and the Babylonians. During the period of the Medo-Persian empire, however, the remnant of Jews were allowed to return to Jerusalem to re-build the temple and the city, but they never again became a kingdom and were always under the domination of the world rulers of the time. This state of affairs continued for a long time, and then Jesus made his appearance on the world scene, when as we know the Jews filled

up the cup of their iniquity by crucifying the Son of God, their Messiah. When they were crying for his death, they said *'His blood be on us, and on our children'*. Matthew 27 v. 25.

And so God meted out further terrible punishment on His people, when in AD70 the terrible siege of Jerusalem came to an end and the Jews were scattered this time unto all the nations of the world in accordance with Old Testament prophecies.

Many people today believe that this was the end of God's dealings with the Jews and that from that time He cast them off, having no further purpose with them. But this is not true and is contrary to scriptural teaching. God said

'I will gather you from all the nations, and from all the places whither I have driven you, saith the Lord; and I will bring you again into the place whence I caused you to be carried away captive.'

Jeremiah 29. 14

The prophet Ezekiel was given a vision of a valley full of dry bones which in stages came together to form skeletons first of all, then they were covered with sinews and flesh to form bodies although they were dead, and finally breath came into them to cause them to live and they then stood up *'an exceeding great army'*. You can read his account in Ezekiel ch. 37. The prophet was told by God that these bones were the whole house of Israel.

The following chapter, Ezekiel 38, tells us about an invasion which is to occur when Israel have been brought out of captivity and regathered to the land. This invasion is to come from the *'north quarters'* (v. 6). The invader is described by the prophet Daniel (chapter 11) as the *'king of the north'*. I will not now go into the present-day identification of who this invader is because this is a subject in itself, but suffice it to say that Israel will be completely overcome. It will be at this time that God will intervene in world affairs, and Jesus Christ will return to the earth to save the nation of Israel and to set up the kingdom of God with his throne in Jerusalem. The prophet Zechariah says, *'Behold the day of the Lord cometh . . . For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; . . . Then shall the Lord go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle . . . And the Lord shall be King over all the earth.'* Zechariah 14 v. 1-3, 9.

So what is the position today? We have seen a virtually dead and scattered people, symbolised by the valley of dry bones, regathered to the land and formed into the State of Israel in 1948. They have had to fight for survival, but they are a proud and confident people now, and would appear to be no more prepared to accept their Messiah now than when he came the first time. But they have to be brought to a state of humility and utter dependence of God for their deliverance. God has said that He will replace their heart of stone with a heart of flesh, a receptive heart, Ezekiel 11 v. 9. Soon we believe they will be invaded by the northern confederacy of Ezekiel 38. This will be opposed by yet another group of nations mentioned in the same chapter, and so all nations will become involved as God declared through Zechariah.

But this time of great trouble is linked with the salvation of the servants of God

right down through the ages, both living and dead, when Jesus will raise those dead who 'sleep' in him and gather his disciples who are still living. I feel I can do better to conclude the answer to this question than by quoting the following verses:

'And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.' *Daniel 12. 1,2.*

'And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up, and lift up your heads: for your redemption draweth nigh'

'So likewise ye, when ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand *Luke 21. 28, 31.*

'For if the casting away of them (Israel) be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?' *Romans 11. 15.*

And so the answer to your question is that because of their disobedience long ago the surrounding nations are still 'pricks in their eyes and thorns in their sides'. They will continue to fight for their right to possess the land but at a time when they have achieved a measure of success they will be invaded. This we know from Ezekiel 38 (particularly verse 11). The Apostle Paul also writing to the Thessalonians said 'For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them... I. Thess. 5. v. 3. When Israel is brought to her knees God will send His son Jesus Christ back to the earth to raise the dead and to gather all those who have believed in him. Those who have been found worthy will be given everlasting life and so an immortal army will go out to conquer the aggressor and save Israel, who will then recognise Jesus as their Saviour and Messiah. Jesus will then sit upon the restored throne of his forefather David in Jerusalem as was promised at his birth (Luke 1. v. 32), and will establish the kingdom of God throughout the whole of the earth.

D. Evar

BIBLE CORRESPONDENCE COURSE

The Light Bible Correspondence Course is in two parts. The first covers an outline of Bible teaching about the Gospel and the second is a more detailed study of important Bible doctrines and the Christian way of life.

There is no charge for the course. The first lesson and an enrolment form can be obtained by writing to Mr. M. J. Walker, 15 Brentfield Road, Dartford, Kent, England, or if you live in the British Isles, to M. J. Walker, FREEPOST, Dartford, DA1 3BR, (no stamp required).

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The Christadelphians

believe the Bible (Old and New Testaments)

to be the wholly inspired and infallible Word of God.

Its principal theme is the setting up of the Kingdom of God on earth under the rulership of Jesus Christ.

LIGHT ON A NEW WORLD is devoted to promoting a better understanding of this true Christian hope.



Information about public meetings arranged by the Christadelphians in particular areas and the names of the nearest Christadelphian representatives can be had on request.

